

July 27, 2011

Catapult launches F-35C for the first time



NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, LAKEHURST, N.J. -- Navy test pilot Lt. Christopher Tabert takes to the sky July 27 in an F-35C test aircraft launched by a steam catapult for the first time. CF-3 is the designated carrier suitability testing aircraft, and is in Lakehurst for catapult and jet blast deflector testing. The F-35C is the carrier variant of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and is distinct from the F-35A and F-35B variants. It has larger wing surfaces and reinforced landing gear for slower catapult launch and landing approach speeds and deck impacts associated with the demanding carrier take-off and landing environment. The F-35C is undergoing test and evaluation at NAS Patuxent River prior to eventual delivery to the fleet.

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, LAKEHURST, N.J. – The F-35C completed its first steam catapult launch July 27 marking another milestone toward initial ship trials in 2013.

Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Launch and Recovery Equipment) Brandon Barr used a TC-13 Mod 2 test steam catapult, representative of current fleet technology, launching F-35C test aircraft CF-3 into the sky.

"It was great to be able to be a part of this milestone in the F-35C test program," said Navy test pilot Lt. Chris Tabert. "Due to the hard work of the entire test team, the event went very well and I look forward to seeing the airplane operate from the carrier."

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CF-3 is the designated carrier suitability testing aircraft, assigned to the F-35 integrated test facility at Naval Air Station Patuxent River.

Tabert is the most junior test pilot to fly any variant of the F-35, which reflects a deliberate shaping of the test force which balances experienced military and contractor test pilots with newly qualified test pilots with recent fleet experience.

"Our first trip here to Lakehurst went very smoothly because of the true collaboration and hard work from the integrated team," said Tom Briggs, government air vehicle engineering manager. "We look forward to another productive visit and staying on track for initial ship trials."

In addition to the catapult launches at varying power levels, the integrated test team will execute a test plan over three weeks to include dual-aircraft jet blast deflector testing and catapult launches using a degraded catapult configuration to measure the effects of steam ingestion on the aircraft.

The ability to degrade the catapult is unique to the test facilities at Lakehurst.

"We are pleased to have NAVAIR Lakehurst support the first F-35C steam catapult launch," said Kathleen Donnelly, senior executive for Support Equipment and Aircraft, Launch and Recovery Equipment(ALRE). "Our dedicated personnel, along with our shipboard representative steam catapult, enable the Navy to have accurate and timely test data necessary to evaluate the compatibility of this critical weapons system with ALRE systems."

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